

Hobbies

Don't look too hard for aluminum pennies

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers questions about the lowly cent, an always-popular collectible.

Q—I understand that aluminum pennies are quite valuable. What are the chances of finding one in my pocket change?

Y. T., Chicago

A—Nil. Treasury officials produced about 1.5 million aluminum cents 16 years ago when lawmakers in Washington were considering legislation to change the metal composition of Lincoln pennies. The proposal never became law, and government workers destroyed the experimental

aluminum coins except for a handful that were given to members of Congress and their staffs.

No 1974-dated aluminum cent has been sold at auction. Experts say such a coin probably would fetch a huge price if it were to appear on the market, assuming government agents didn't confiscate it first.

Incidentally, the Smithsonian Institution now owns one of the aluminum cents.

Q—My wife inherited more than 300 Indian-head cents. Which dates are rare and how can we sell them?

H. J., Evergreen Park

A—Retail prices for "good condition" specimens range from 60 cents each for Indian heads made between 1900 and 1908 to nearly \$200 for an 1877. The 1909-S (for San Francisco) goes for \$100 in "good" and all the coins produced between 1866 and 1872 sell for at least \$20

each.

Many coin dealers will buy Indian-head cents at lower wholesale prices, which often are from 30 percent to 50 percent below retail.

(Readers who want a free price list to use in evaluating Indian-head cents should send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Roger Boye, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.)

Q—I've noticed that some Lincoln cents are called "VDB." What do those letters mean?

H. G., Des Plaines

A—They are the initials of Victor D. Brenner, the famous sculptor who designed the coin in 1909. The letters are displayed prominently on the tails sides of some 1909-dated Lincolns. If you look hard, you can find the initials on newly minted cents near the front-side rim at 7 o'clock.